A N

OCCASIONAL DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL of St. PETER in YORK,

JANUARY 27, 1788,

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE

AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE.

By W. MASON, M. A.

PRECENTOR and CANON RESIDENTIARY of YORK.

Y O R K:

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TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR WILLIAM MILNER, BARONET,

LORD MAYOR,

AND TO THE INHABITANTS OF THE

CITY OF YORK,

THIS SERMON, PUBLISHED

IN DEFERENCE ONLY TO THEIR

REQUEST,

IS, WITH ALL POSSIBLE RESPECT,

INSCRIBED

BY

THEIR MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT,

W. MASON.

RESIDENTIARY-HOUSE,
February 1, 1788.

A

SERMON.

ACTS xvii. 28.

— FOR WE ALSO ARE HIS OFFSPRING.*

THIS quotation from a Greek, and conſequently a heathen Poet, the eloquent Apoſtle of the Gentiles condeſcended to uſe, when he was endeavouring to convert the greateſt maſters of human wiſdom, from the greateſt proof of human folly, the worſhip of idols; when he was aſſerting the unity of that great firſt cauſe, which they ſo little underſtood, as to erect an altar to him under the appellation of *the unknown God*. This univerſal ſource of life, breath, and

* Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γενός ἐσμεν. ARATUS.

all created beings, he declares to them, " made of one blood, all men to dwell on " the face of the earth," and determined, by his divine Preſcience, both the times of their exiſtence, and the bounds of their habitation.

Of theſe two fundamental truths, upon which not only natural but revealed religion is founded, the exiſtence of a firſt cauſe, and the deduction thence of all created beings, it is clear from the text that the heathens themſelves were apprized, tho' they failed to draw from them that conſequence, which, of all others, ſeems the moſt natural, that created beings, of the ſame ſpecies, muſt of neceſſity be, one to another, in a ſtate of equality, and that the human ſpecies, in particular, being, as the Apoſtle phraſes it, of the ſame blood, had all

of

of them the ſame pretenſions to the equal bleſſings of nature, being formed by the ſame hand, and endued with the ſame faculties for enjoying pleaſure, and ſuffering pain; that though the place or climate in which they happened to be born, and the time of their birth, or, to ſpeak more accurately in the words of St. Paul, "the times which God had appointed them, and the bounds of their habitation" might occaſion ſome accidental difference as to the cultivation of thoſe faculties, and the modes of thoſe pleaſures and pains, yet the original capacity for all of them was ſtill the ſame, and that all being alike human creatures, there was neither gift nor faculty beſtowed on the nature of humanity that belonged of right more to one than another of the human ſpecies.

To the divine miſſion of St. Paul, nothing was more neceſſary than the eſtabliſhment of this primary truth; he was the profeſſed apoſtle of the Gentiles, and under that character had as many prejudices to overcome as if, like St. Peter, he had only been the apoſtle of the Jews and their proſelytes. The Jews, deeming themſelves the peculiar people of God, we know, had the ſtrongeſt objection imaginable to a Meſſiah who was to ſave or redeem any nation except their own; and the Greeks, who held all nations but theirs to be barbarians, were full as unlikely to embrace a faith to be held in common, not only with the Jews, but the reſt of a barbarous world: The doctrine which exhorted all men, wherever ſituated, to embrace one common ſalvation, was therefore as little ſuited to the pretenſions of the one as to the pride of the other.

But

But though St. Paul, by proceeding upon this fundamental truth, and thence deducing the doctrine of an univerſal Redeemer, diſſeminated the goſpel ſo far, as to make the ſucceſs of his preaching a miracle almoſt equal to any performed by his divine maſter, inſomuch that infidelity has been put to its utmoſt ſubterfuges to invalidate its force; yet this truth itſelf, this neceſſary inference from the goſpel, that all men are the offspring of God, was not, either by himſelf or his ſucceſſors, ſo far eſtabliſhed in a refractory world as to make it an univerſal rule of moral action; nay, we have it ſtill to lament that it is as little attended to at this preſent hour, as it was when the apoſtle firſt preached it to the Athenians. The diſtinction between Greek and Barbarian has indeed ceaſed, or rather names and ſcenes are ſhifted, and the Greeks are now

become, in the eyes of the more civilized nations in Europe, themſelves barbarians; yet every diſtinct European ſtate, in proportion as it acquires a real, or even an aſſumed pretenſion to ſuperior civilization, is too apt to impute to the reſt of the world a proportional degree of barbarity, and conſequently, whatever they may think, they are ſometimes inclined to act toward them as if they were not of the ſame ſacred original. Nor is this much to be wondered at, when we reflect that the ſame falſe notion prevails amongſt individuals of the ſame nation: Every accidental advantage, which either birth, riches, or education gives, becomes nutriment to this over-weening pride, and equally leads the poſſeſſors of them to behave to thoſe who want ſuch caſual advantages, as if they derived their exiſtence from two different ſources.

But

But there is one enormous prejudice of this kind, which, for a long ſeries of years, has infected the European part of the globe, not only individually but nationally; a prejudice which chriſtianity has almoſt univerſally failed to eradicate, I mean that futile, but at the ſame time horrible, opinion, which, reſting itſelf on argument that can go no deeper than the very ſurface and tincture of the ſkin, has led many, who yet call themſelve chriſtians, to treat beings of the ſame divine origin with themſelves, even worſe than they think themſelves permitted to treat the beaſts that periſh: Beings that have immortal ſouls like themſelves, enſhrined in a body which, tho' it has a variation of complexion, has hardly any in form or in feature. This more than Pagan prejudice I ſhould think myſelf worthily employed in execrating through the remainder

mainder of this diſcourſe, did I not foreſee, with heart-felt ſatisfaction, that wiſer and better heads than my own are about to endeavour, by the beſt and moſt legal means, at a demolition of the evil, by putting a ſtop to that merchandize, dreadful term! when employed to ſignify the traffic which MEN make of MEN, which has ſo long been the worſt of diſgraces to the name of Chriſtians and of Britons.

But were I to enter the liſts againſt thoſe, and, to the diſgrace of the very name of man, ſome there are who vindicate what they call the SLAVE TRADE, and who, by the very term they uſe, do enough to make every benevolent breaſt receive their arguments with deteſtation, I ſhould think that I profaned the ſanctity of this place, that I diſgraced the dignity of

of my ſubject, which is no leſs than the great cauſe of humanity; I ſhould think that I ſurrendered the principles of chriſtianity, if I condeſcended to anſwer any of their political reaſonings; or even deigned to take into conſideration the advantages which accrue from the permiſſion, or the diſadvantages which might reſult from the prohibition of this inhuman barter. Still more ſhould I think that I did diſhonour to myſelf, as a preacher of the goſpel of Chriſt, if, with all the inſipid coldneſs of a common moraliſt, I ſhould for a moment allow the intellectual faculties of the African man to be naturally inferior to thoſe of the European, and then philoſophically argue, that as plants may be meliorated and become more vigorous by tranſplanting them into a richer ſoil, ſo it might be poſſible, by

by the culture of education, to improve the intellects even of an African Savage.*

Far

* That the natural inferiority of their underſtanding makes the Negroes incapable of receiving ſuch culture, will hardly be admitted by any true Chriſtian, who conſiders that the Apoſtle Philip was ſent, by a divinely appointed meſſenger, to meet the Ethiopian Eunuch at Gaza in the deſert, and there baptize him. (See Acts viii. 26.) We are told here that this perſonage, the Treaſurer of Queen Candace, had before believed in the Divine Unity, and was on his journey to worſhip at Jeruſalem, where he had probably been before admitted by the Jews as a proſelyte of the gate. We find too that he was ſufficiently ſkilled in Hebrew literature to read the ſublime poetry of Iſaiah, and that he was peculiarly choſen of God to be one of the firſt converts to Chriſtianity, his converſion being placed in order of time before that of Saul. Such a believer will certainly thence infer, that as God is no reſpecter of perſons, he has made no diſtinction in his gifts to the Human Species. In proſecuting this diſquiſition further, men of letters may perhaps be led to inveſtigate an opinion of a very late French writer, M. Volney, who in his travels into Syria and Egypt (I quote from the Engliſh tranſlation of them, Vol. I. Page 81) has, amongſt ſome other hiſtorical reaſons, adduced a paſſage from Herodotus, who believes that as the Colchi were an antient colony from Egypt, they were, like the Egyptians, actually Negroes. The words of the Father of Hiſtory are, ἄυλος δὲ ἴικασα τῇδε, καὶ ὅτι μελάγχροες εἶσι καὶ ὐλότριχες. *Liber* ii. *cap.* 104. "That, like them, they have black ſkins and frizzled hair." The reflection which the learned traveller makes on this is ſo very

Far from myſelf, far from all who ſhould either write, preach, or think upon the ſubject with the ſpirit of thoſe goſpels in their minds, be ſo tame, ſo unanimated a mode of treating the ſub-

very appoſite to the general doctrine of my diſcourſe, that it is on that account I have chiefly quoted it. "This hiſtorical fact affords to "philoſophy an intereſting ſubject of reflection. How are we aſtoniſhed "when we behold the preſent barbariſm and ignorance of the Copts "deſcended from the profound genius of the Egyptians, and the bril-"liant intelligence of the Greeks; when we reflect that to the race of "Negroes, at preſent our Slaves and the object of our extreme con-"tempt, we owe our Arts, Sciences, and even the very uſe of "Speech; and when we recollect that in the midſt of thoſe nations, who "call themſelves the Friends of Liberty and Humanity, the moſt bar-"barous of Slaveries is juſtified, and that it is even a problem whether "the underſtanding of Negroes be of the ſame ſpecies with that of "White Men!" P. 83.

But as the inſtance of *one* individual is with me, and perhaps will be with the generality of my readers, ſufficient to decide on this queſtion, let me, laſtly, quote the letters of poor Ignatius Sancho, as a ſufficient proof not only of African Capacity, but of true humanity. This man received the principal advantages reſulting from European culture, in a great family, in which he was many years a menial ſervant, but which I ſhould be apt to think not the beſt ſchool, did I not at the ſame time reflect that the moſt noble head of that family muſt (I ſpeak from knowledge of his innate benevolence) have uniformly ſet him the beſt of all examples.——*See the Preface to* Sancho's Letters.

ject. If ever Eloquence was in its place, here might it exert its utmoſt force, without a fear of miſleading Reaſon, or of acting too powerfully upon the paſſions. If ever Argumentation, or Logic, can be uſeleſs or miſapplied, it is here they muſt be ſo, becauſe they would be employed in the refutation of ſelf-evident falſehood. If ever the true genius of Chriſtianity, which is then beſt exerted when it gives glory to God in the higheſt, and on earth peace, good will towards men, can be urged with ſuperior efficacy to this its twofold purpoſe, it muſt be in reprobating a practice which derogates from the glory of that God, and ſpreads deſtruction, carnage, and tyranny over a great part of that ſpecies of beings born to be rational, and capable, by good treatment, of being highly ſo, and which he has dignified with the title of his offspring.

But

But even from the laſt and beſt of theſe aſſiſtances, the inſpired writings themſelves, it ſeems unneceſſary to borrow aid on this occaſion. Thoſe of my hearers, who are leaſt read in thoſe ſacred pages, muſt have learned from them this plain, yet important truth, that they ought to do to others as they would wiſh others ſhould do to them; and they muſt be ignorant indeed if they do not deduce from that divine rule this direct conſequence, that as they would not themſelves wiſh to be NEGRO SLAVES, ſo they ought to wiſh, and as far as poſſible endeavour to free every Negro from the bonds of ſlavery.

This matter then being ſo very obvious to every underſtanding, I will venture to turn my diſcourſe to a topic, from which I conceive it poſſible, yet

barely poſſible, that ſome little prĕju-dice may ariſe againſt this moſt be-nevolent attempt, reſulting from the place, time, and perſons whence the hu-mane idea originated. It commenced firſt, as is well known, in that part of America which was very lately ſubject to the crown of Great Britain, and ſoon after the time when its inhabitants ceaſed to be our fellow-ſubjects, but not to be our fel-low-chriſtians. To deſcend more minutely into particulars (endeavouring at the ſame time cautiouſly to avoid any expreſſion that might tend to awaken the leaſt ſpark of jealouſy) it began, I believe, firſt in the ſtate of Penſylvania, wherein a religious ſect had long been eſtabliſhed, which, for certain ſingular notions and habits that they adopted, the diſſolute court of Charles the Second had called by an opprobrious name. But whatever might then, or may

now

now be juſtly objected to theſe notions, or to any enthuſiaſtic tenet of theirs, which we hold to be unſcriptural, I have yet the boldneſs to aſſert, that, as good ſubjects and good citizens, their conduct has long made them reſpectable; the diſcreet management of their own poor has made them an object of emulation. It is true, that the ſimplicity of their manners, and of their deportment, may incur the contempt of the falſely polite, and the ridicule of frivolous and unfeeling faſhion; yet ſuch ridicule and ſuch contempt, I am perſuaded, they will contentedly bear, if they can only gain, what is ſurely their due, that attention to the example they have ſet, which, deſpiſing every idle prejudice, may lead all denominations of Chriſtians heartily to concur in that righteous cauſe which they began diſintereſtedly, have purſued ſteadily, and

ſeem

ſeem to proceed in ſucceſsfully; inſo-much that, did the ſobriety of their ſect ſuffer them to glorify themſelves be-fore men, they might ſay with honeſt confidence, "We are employed on a godly "matter, a matter in which he, whom "the Papacy has called the Moſt Chriſ-"tian, and he whom he has called the "Moſt Catholic King, might be proud "to join us. Thou alſo of all others "mighteſt be proud to join us, who, inhe-"riting by ſucceſſion that title of Defen-"der of the Faith, which the ſame ſpirit "of Antichriſt firſt conferred on a *tyrant, "holdeſt it now by the beſt of all human "charters, the united ſuffrages of a free "and a proteſtant people." Thus might theſe plain men expreſs a bold, but at the

* Henry VIII. to whom Pope Leo X. gave this title as a reward for a defence of the Papal Power and Tenets which the king had written againſt Luther.

the ſame time a moſt juſt ſentiment; and there is no doubt but that one of theſe Monarchs would, if directed only by the dictates of his own heart, be ready to join them. But the wiſdom of our conſtitution, by ſetting limits to his power, has, in this peculiar caſe, ſet limits to his humanity. He cannot, and, I truſt, he would not wiſh to ſay "I will by my "own individual authority put an abſolute "prohibition on this unchriſtian traffic." But he might and would juſtly ſay, "to the "petitions of my people, I will lend a "ready ear; to the determinations of my "parliament I will afford a joyful ſanction." May he not be deprived of that joy! for who but the King of a free, as well as a Proteſtant nation, ſhould have the glory of leading the other Potentates of Europe on ſo godlike an enterprize. May he not be deprived of that glory! May

the voice of his parliament be unanimous in the cauſe; in that cauſe may the petitions of his people be ſtrenuous, urgent, and univerſal.

To the univerſality of ſuch petitions I have the pleaſure to find that the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of this ancient city, and the worſhipful the Aldermen have, like ſome other corporate bodies in the kingdom, judiciouſly contributed their aſſiſtance; and hence it is reaſonably to be inferred, that the gentry, clergy, and all other its inhabitants will follow their laudable example. But *laudable* is too feeble an epithet on this occaſion, it is moral Patriotiſm! * it is Chriſtian Heroiſm!

Having

* This epithet is ſomewhat *hazarded*; I would be underſtood to mean by it, that as patriotiſm itſelf only ſignifies the love of our country, ſo with this addition, the term indicates a love of mankind

Having ſaid this, I have only to apologize for myſelf on having addreſt you ſo long, in a ſtile and manner ſomewhat unuſual in diſcourſes from this place. Let the peculiarity, as well as the importance of the ſubject plead my excuſe. But if the manner in which I have treated it, ſhould not be thought improper; if it ſhould only be thought well intended, let me have reaſon to hope that what I have ſaid may, when this great queſtion comes before the parliament, induce my preſent audience to join in the public prayer of our church with peculiar fervour, that Almighty God "would be pleaſed to direct and proſper all their conſultations to the advancement of his glory, the good of his church, the ſafety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and

mankind under the idea of *one common family*. Natural religion teaches this, but revelation goes farther, it bids to love and do good to all men as *brethren*; to endeavour therefore to give Slaves Freedom, becauſe they are our *brethren*, I denominate Chriſtian Heroiſm. Revelation goes farther ſtill, and conſiders Chriſtians, one with another, as links or members of one body, the head of which is Chriſt the Lord. *See Epheſ. paſſim.*

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his kingdoms:" For what can be more for the advancement of God's glory than the emancipation of whole nations from the worſt of ſlavery? What more for the good of his church, than the almoſt certain introduction of innumerable tribes of free men, then only capable of becoming good and practical Chriſtians, into its ſacred pale.* What

* To prove this aſſertion fully would require a ſeparate diſcourſe. So far as civilization is concerned in the queſtion, it has been well diſcuſſed by the maſterly pen of a Warburton, in a ſermon delivered to the ſociety for propagating the goſpel in foreign parts, 1766. But as nothing reſembles the fate of the leaves of the Sibyls ſo much as ſermons printed ſingly, I have not been able in this place to procure a copy of it in due time. I wiſh however to refer my readers to a very curious letter from the Indians in the back ſettlements of America, printed by the Society in the account of their proceedings that ſame year. In that letter the Savages, in their rude yet energetic manner, requeſt Engli working tools as well as Engliſh miſſionaries to be ſent to them. Hence, as I remember, the learned Biſhop very ſagely infers, that civilization ſhould always either precede or accompany converſion.

How much the benevolent intention of the Society above-mentioned has been impeded, if not abſolutely prevented, not

What more for the ſafety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and his kingdoms, than the utter abolition of that execrable commerce, which has been ſo long the diſgrace of every king, of every nation that have permitted it: A commerce, which, if longer perſiſted in, may draw down the vengeance of an offended God to viſit, not only Great Britain, but all Europe, with every calamity which they juſtly deſerve who even connive at the deſtruction, or permit the captivity, of HIS OFFSPRING.

not only by the *Slave-ſeller* but the *Slave-buyer*, may be gathered from a moſt judicious diſcourſe of the preſent Biſhop of Ba gor, preached before that Society laſt year, which I earneſtly recommend to the reader, as he will there find arguments againſt the Slave-Trade, which will make him ample amends for any deficiency of them in theſe few and haſtily-written pages.